

Fact Sheet

EXPEDITED ASSISTANCE PROGRAM QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: What is expedited assistance?

Answer: Expedited assistance is advanced funds made available to disaster victims to help them meet immediate needs of individuals and families displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

Question: How much money will be available for expedited assistance and what can it be used for?

Answer: Currently the amount of money being distributed through this special expedited assistance is \$2,000 per qualified household, which can be used for emergency purchases and disaster-related needs such as food, shelter, clothing and personal necessities.

Question: What do individuals need to do to receive expedited assistance?

Answer: The first step to qualify for federal assistance is to register with FEMA by either going online to www.fema.gov or calling FEMA's toll-free registration line at 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) - TTY 800-462-7585. Disaster victims are encouraged to register on-line due to the possibility of high call volume. In addition, phone lines are open 24-hours, 7 days a week.

Question: How can I receive the expedited assistance?

Answer: Once individuals register with FEMA for assistance, expedited assistance will be made available to individuals through electronic funds transfer (EFT) directly into their bank account, or issued a check. Specific to the shelter population currently housed in the Houston Astrodome, a new process of issuing debit cards is being used and represents a small percentage of the actual expedited assistance being distributed by FEMA.

Question: Who is eligible for the expedited assistance?

Answer: Displaced residents from Mississippi and Louisiana impacted by Hurricane Katrina are eligible for expedited assistance.

Question: How can people receive checks if they are housed in a shelter?

Answer: FEMA is working with the US Postal Service to determine the best way to get checks through the mail to a temporary address.

Question: Is that the only assistance people will get from FEMA?

Answer: The expedited assistance being made available to individuals will be only a portion, and serves as an advance, of the total assistance many people may need or be eligible for, and normal eligibility determinations will result in subsequent payments of assistance in the future.

Question: What is the debit card that is being handed out by FEMA?

Answer: The debit card is a pilot program that is being made available in the Houston Astrodome, as well as San Antonio and Dallas, and represents one form of distributing expedited assistance to thousands of evacuees housed in those shelters. Most expedited assistance being distributed to disaster victims will be done through electronic funds transfers or by checks.

Question: Will this program be expanded to other cities and shelters as well?

Answer: Debit cards are a pilot program currently being tried in the Houston Astrodome. The astrodome was selected as it's the largest concentrated shelter population. Based on how well it works, and the needs in other areas, a decision will be made as to how effective it is compared to the other forms of getting expedited assistance to people.

Question: How do people use the debit card?

Answer: The debit cards will be immediately loaded with the \$2,000 of expedited assistance and handed to the applicant. Debit cards are very similar to credit cards in that they can be used to withdraw cash from ATMs and make purchases at locations with the Master Card logo just as with a regular bank-issued card.

Question: Do people who receive the debit card get more money in expedited assistance?

Answer: The emergency funds distributed through debit cards do not provide victims with more assistance than what others may get, but adds an additional delivery method to help those who are unable to access bank accounts or mail delivery. People who will be eligible for the debit card will be extremely limited.

Question: What does FEMA do if it suspects fraud?

Answer: In this, and in all FEMA programs, the agency asks that if individuals suspect fraud or abuse of any FEMA programs to contact the fraud hotline at 1-800323-8603.